

# A Lesson for All Rebels at Home

## *The Holmes County, Ohio, Rebellion of 1863 Revisited*

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On June 17, 1863, over four hundred Union Army troops sent by state and military authorities to crush resisters to the draft enrollment encountered a force of armed men in the hills of Holmes County, in east-central Ohio just south of the Western Reserve, in what can be described fairly as a small battle. The self-described “secessionists” fired on the advancing troops, and the troops responded with a volley and a bayonet charge. Though of short duration and nearly bloodless, the encounter proved decisive in the federal government’s effort to suppress widespread enrollment resistance in northern Ohio. In the coming months, government officials deployed coercive power to quell violent resistance throughout the region. Military action was the first step in asserting the authority of state and federal governments over a restive and organized resistance.

Today the Holmes County episode is well known but poorly understood. Both scholars and local antiquarians alike dismiss the fight—commonly called “Fort Fizzle”—as a comic-opera act of resistance to the draft enrollment. Starting from a minor rock-throwing incident, they assert, things grew out of hand. The resisters never intended to stage a major act of defiance and were sorry they had.<sup>1</sup> Echoing local folklore, historian Kenneth H. Wheeler

1. Many local historians have written about the Holmes County uprising. The cornerstone of local antiquarian and scholarly treatments is an apologia written by John P. Hentz, a Holmes County pastor who interviewed one of the initial assailants, Peter Stuber, in 1888. All subsequent works on the incident rely to one degree or another on this account. See John P. Hentz, “The

argues that the armed men were just a small group of backwoods immigrants. “Rarely considering the world beyond” their isolated corner of Ohio, these non-English-speaking farmers wanted merely to be left alone and in control of their simple lives. Their display of “localistic patriotism” never intended to provoke government retaliation.<sup>2</sup> Wheeler’s interpretation minimizing the scope of the uprising and its organization has become the frequently cited standard view of the incident. Following Wheeler, the authors of a recent Ohio-history textbook portray the episode as “flamboyant” but halfhearted resistance in defense of “individualism and local autonomy.”<sup>3</sup>

This standard view of the Holmes County incident as the disorganized effort of foreign-born backwoodsmen both informs and conforms to different interpretations of Civil War draft resistance in the North put forward by historians. According to one school of thought, draft resistance was spontaneous, “organic and unpredictable”; it arose in the heat of the moment and lacked ideological motive.<sup>4</sup> According to one scholar, local extralegal violence against the draft was “grassroots and uncoordinated rather than the imagined large-scale national conspiracies forming a staple of Republican discourse.” Citing Wheeler’s analysis of the Holmes County events, that scholar concludes

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Rebellion in Holmes County in 1863 Recalled,” *Holmes County Farmer*, Feb. 19 and 26, 1903. Another county resident interviewed several persons present in 1863, including a government detective, and wrote a version of the story highlighting participation by members of a secret society. See J. R. Vance, “Holmes County Rebellion—Fort Fizzle,” *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (Jan. 1931): 30–43. Other accounts include Homer A. Ramey, “Fort Fizzle,” *Northwest Ohio Historical Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (1941): 1–7; D. W. Garber, *The Holmes County Rebellion* (Perrysville, OH: Privately printed, 1967), and Patrick J. Drouhard, *It Don’t Look Right for the Times: The Factual History of the Holmes County Rebellion* (N.p.: Privately printed, 2007). A descendant of participants in the uprising, Mr. Drouhard consulted archival records at the National Archives for his useful account, setting it apart from other treatments. I thank him for sharing with me family correspondence from the Civil War era. The popular name for the episode, “Fort Fizzle,” perhaps derives from local Unionist derision aimed at antiwar opponents. The district provost marshal later described his attitude: “I have not forgotten that I was a disbeliever in the reports that came to me from day to day that there was to be trouble in Holmes Co.—it came, it saw, it fizzled.” Capt. James L. Drake to Col. E. A. Parrott, July 23, 1863, Record Group 110, Provost Marshal General Bureau Records, E 4833, Letters Sent, vol. 1:16, National Archives and Records Administration, Chicago, IL [hereafter cited NARA-C].

2. Kenneth H. Wheeler, “Local Autonomy and Civil War Draft Resistance: Holmes County, Ohio,” *Civil War History* 45, no. 2 (June 1999): 147–59.

3. Gregory S. Wilson and Kevin F. Kern, *Ohio: A History of the Buckeye State* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 229. The authors call the episode “Fort Fizzle.”

4. Joan E. Cashin, “Deserters, Civilians, and Draft Resistance in the North,” in *The War Was You and Me: Civilians in the American Civil War*, ed. Joan E. Cashin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2002), 263–64. See also Paul A. Cimbala and Randall M. Miller, *The Northern Home Front during the Civil War* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2017), 140–42.

that resisters simply wanted to be left alone.<sup>5</sup> Other historians argue men were up in arms over perceived class and ethnic injustice implicit in the commutation clause of the recently enacted federal conscription law, allowing a drafted man to pay the significant sum of \$300 or to hire a substitute to avoid service (“a rich man’s war, the poor man’s fight”).<sup>6</sup> Still others say opposition emerged out of distrust of growing centralization of power in the federal government.<sup>7</sup> Some historians see resistance arising from disgust over Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation and the abolitionist turn it represented.<sup>8</sup>

Common to all these analyses is that draft resistance was disorganized, leaderless, isolated, unplanned, and unconnected to other acts of draft resistance and defiance of government authority, either in Ohio or neighboring states. Scholars suggest that violence occurred primarily among foreign-born ethnic groups, exemplified by the Irish Catholic immigrants who rioted in New York City and Boston. It posed no threat to government authority or to the ability of the Republican administration of President Abraham Lincoln to prosecute the Union war effort.

This common view of draft resistance as spontaneous and disorganized relies heavily on historian Frank L. Klement’s thesis regarding antiwar or

5. Robert M. Sandow, “Damnable Treason or Party Organs? Democratic Secret Societies in Pennsylvania,” in *This Distracted and Anarchical People: New Answers for Old Questions about the Civil War-Era North*, ed. Andrew L. Slap and Michael Thomas Smith (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2013), 42–43, 51. See also Robert M. Sandow, *Deserter County: Civil War Opposition in the Pennsylvania Appalachians* (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2009). Other accounts of draft violence stressing its spontaneous origins include Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990); William F. Hanna, “The Boston Draft Riot,” *Civil War History* 36, no. 3 (Sept. 1990): 262–73; Jack Tager, *Boston Riots: Three Centuries of Social Violence* (Boston: Northeastern Univ. Press, 2001), 135.

6. See Grace Palladino, *Another Civil War: Labor, Capital, and the State in the Anthracite Regions of Pennsylvania, 1840–1868* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1990). See also Peter Levine, “Draft Evasion in the North during the Civil War, 1863–1865,” *Journal of American History* 67, no. 4 (Mar. 1981): 816–34. Tyler Anbinder has pushed back against the economic interpretation. See Tyler Anbinder, “Which Poor Man’s Fight? Immigrants and the Federal Conscription of 1863,” *Civil War History* 52, no. 4 (Dec. 2006): 344–72. See also J. Matthew Gallman, *The North Fights the Civil War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1994), 146–50; J. Matthew Gallman, *Mastering War-time: A Social History of Philadelphia during the Civil War* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990), 175–78.

7. Robert E. Sterling, “Civil War Draft Resistance in the Middle West” (PhD diss., Northern Illinois Univ., 1974); Levine, “Draft Evasion in the North during the Civil War, 1863–1865,” and Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*.

8. See Arnold M. Shankman, *The Pennsylvania Antiwar Movement* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1980); Arnold M. Shankman, “Draft Resistance in Civil War Pennsylvania,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 101, no. 2 (Apr. 1977): 190–204; Hubert H. Wubben, *Civil War Iowa and the Copperhead Movement* (Ames: Iowa State Univ. Press, 1980).

Peace Democrats—the Copperheads—during the Civil War. Klement posited that these conservative Jeffersonian-Jacksonian opponents of Lincoln’s Republican Party were a loyal opposition. Wartime and postwar accusations of Democratic disloyalty and treason resulting in organized resistance and conspiracy were, he repeatedly asserted, lies spread by Republican politicians and military officers for partisan purposes.<sup>9</sup> However, scholars have shown that Klement’s arguments are based on unsourced and erroneous assertions, misused sources, and manufactured events throughout his texts. New scholarship has shown that military authorities and Republican politicians in the Old Northwestern, or Midwestern, or “Middle Border” states north of the Ohio River did not fabricate lies about conspiracies among Northern Democrats. Government officials amassed significant evidence of organized plots to undermine the war effort. Moreover, they believed the evidence.<sup>10</sup>

The standard account of the Holmes County rebellion relies on the small handful of pertinent records selected for publication in the *War of the Rebellion (Official Records)* series and a few highly self-exculpatory memoirs written decades after the 1863 events, all read through Klement-tinted lenses.<sup>11</sup> Overlooked is a plethora of surviving archival records of the event, as well

9. See Frank L. Klement, *The Copperheads in the Middle West* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1960); Frank L. Klement, *The Limits of Dissent: Clement L. Vallandigham and the Civil War* (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1970); Frank L. Klement, *Dark Lanterns: Secret Political Societies, Conspiracies, and Treason Trials in the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1984). Along with those cited above, other historians studying the Northern home front who have relied on Klement include Mark E. Neely Jr., *The Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991); Mark E. Neely, *The Union Divided: Party Conflict in the Civil War North* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2002); William A. Blair, *With Malice Toward Some: Treason and Loyalty in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2014). Klement’s continued influence is seen in essays in Robert M. Sandow, ed., *Contested Loyalty: Debates over Patriotism in the Civil War North* (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2018).

10. See David E. Long, *The Jewel of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln’s Re-election and the End of Slavery* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole, 1994), 314–15n71; Stephen E. Towne, *Surveillance and Spies in the Civil War: Exposing Confederate Conspiracies in America’s Heartland* (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 2015). For works viewing the Copperhead threat as significant, see Jennifer L. Weber, *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln’s Opponents in the North* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006); Nicole Etcheson, *A Generation at War: The Civil War Era in a Northern Community* (Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 2011), 109–13; Christopher Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backward: The Civil War and the Remaking of the American Middle Border* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2016), 268–80. For a study of the Lincoln administration’s struggles to deal with conspiracy and treason through the courts, see Jonathan W. White, *Abraham Lincoln and Treason in the Civil War: The Trials of John Merriman* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 2011).

11. Wheeler’s account relies heavily on Peter Stuber’s memoir as recorded by Hentz, as well as an account compiled in 1968(!) transmitting family lore.

as important first-person accounts by soldiers and others written during or within days of the uprising. These records belie the localist argument and make clear that armed men from several neighboring counties flocked to Holmes County at the start of the resistance. They came from many ethnic backgrounds, but primarily were native-born white Anglo Americans and not just immigrants. Their allegiance to the Democratic Party and opposition to the Lincoln administration's war policies united them. Multiple sources indicate they identified themselves as "secessionists," intent on fighting side by side against Republican tyranny. In addition, records show similar violence against enrollment officers occurred in almost all the neighboring counties. One particular incident occurred in neighboring Knox County the day after the Holmes County event and involved hundreds of armed "insurgents" who intimidated a substantial force of troops sent to guard enrolling officers. Some of the men involved in the Knox County incidents had participated in the Holmes County uprising, thus intertwining events in the two counties.

Finally, and most importantly, records of federal officers and eyewitness accounts of the uprisings indicate that officials believed the armed men were organized. In interviews, interrogations, and testimony, resisters admitted to membership in secret organizations that opposed the Union effort to defeat the Confederate rebellion and coerce the rebel states back into the Union. Records show government officials ascribed the insurrection to secret organizations and were gravely concerned about organized draft-enrollment resistance in Ohio and neighboring states. They responded with severe measures to quell unrest and bring leaders to punishment. In the following months, authorities arrested scores of men and indicted them for conspiracy. This new examination of the Holmes County uprising, its beginnings, the battle, and the federal government's subsequent prosecution of the perpetrators, based on previously ignored archival sources, provides new insights about affairs on the Northern home front.

## I.

Democratic newspaper editors throughout Ohio celebrated Holmes County as the model Democratic county. Rural, agricultural, and conservative, comfortable with the Jeffersonian-Jacksonian ways of their parents, the voters of "little Holmes" (population: twenty thousand) regularly produced large Democratic majorities to pad statewide party election tallies. With the beginning of war in 1861, the county turned out recruits for Ohio volunteer units

to put down the Confederate rebellion. Many Democrats enlisted in the fight to restore the Union. The Democratic newspaper in the county seat, Millersburg, the *Holmes County Farmer*, which enjoyed a circulation twice that of its Republican rival, served as both the voice of and for the community's party faithful. Lacking surviving manuscripts of Holmes County Democrats, the partisan press must serve as the mouthpiece of the county's residents for historical analysis.<sup>12</sup> At the start of the war, the paper supported the Union war effort and urged readers to fight for "the whole Union and nothing but."<sup>13</sup> As the war dragged on and casualties mounted, however, Democratic support for the war waned. Editorials evinced deep uneasiness about Republican ambitions regarding slavery. Articles about military arrests of Democrats, suppression of Democratic newspapers, and other atrocities of the Lincoln administration filled the newspaper's columns. The president's Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation of September 1862 alarmed and angered many Democrats, marking the end of the *Farmer's* support for the war. Its editor, James A. Estill, a Democratic lawyer with aspirations for elective office, recoiled against the antislavery turn the war had taken. In editorials, he bemoaned the confiscation of rebel-owned property, income taxes, greenbacks, and other measures passed by the Republican Congress. They were not conservative; they threatened the old ways. Democrats in Holmes County turned from the Union war effort and called for ending the fight if it meant freeing the slaves. Democratic candidates in the county handily won the October 1862 elections, nearly doubling their tallies from the previous year.<sup>14</sup>

With the start of 1863, the *Farmer's* tone became darker. With the Emancipation Proclamation in effect, Estill editorialized that the war had become one of "revenge and fanaticism—a war against the constitution and the laws."<sup>15</sup> He published letters written by Holmes County soldiers reporting rank-and-file anger at Lincoln's executive action. One opined that he and his comrades enlisted to save the Union, "but the war has been changed to a wicked crusade

12. Few collections of letters written by Holmes County residents during the Civil War survive. Thus, we have few windows into their thinking. Perhaps the largest and best collection is one now held in Kansas. Christian H. Isely, a Swiss-born Holmes County resident, moved to Kansas shortly before the war and married. He joined a Kansas cavalry regiment and sent his wife, Elise, to live with his parents in Winesburg, Holmes County, Ohio. Her letters to him from Holmes County are replete with reports of his family's antiwar sentiments, which were widely though not uniformly held in the neighborhood. See Katherine Isely McGuire, comp., *Uncommon Writings by Common Folk: Isely Family Letters, Papers and Diaries* (N.p.: N.p., 1988).

13. *Millersburg (OH) Holmes County Farmer*, May 9, 1861.

14. *Millersburg (OH) Holmes County Farmer*, Oct. 17, 1861; Oct. 16, 1862.

15. *Millersburg (OH) Holmes County Farmer*, Feb. 5, 1863.

for the freedom of the niggers.”<sup>16</sup> Estill penned articles calling the Lincoln administration the “Congo dictators.” Congress’s passage of an Enrollment Act on March 3, 1863, was a new abhorrence. It would create an “Army of Poor Men,” its ranks filled by conscripts who could not afford the commutation fee. It would force men to fight for a cause they opposed. Good men would be “sacrificed uselessly if the imbecile management . . . continues.” All young men desired to escape the draft and desert cruel Republican officers who punished Democratic soldiers, he wrote.<sup>17</sup> Throughout the winter and into spring, the party organ spread a message of woe and fear that resonated in the heavily Democratic community. While some Holmes County War Democrats continued to support the coercive effort to restore the Union, most party followers firmly opposed continued hostilities and rejected the draft. Soldiers from the community deserted, and family and friends sheltered deserters from arrest during this period.<sup>18</sup>

As in Holmes County, opposition to Lincoln-administration measures and hostility to African Americans was widespread across northwestern states. During the winter of 1863, tens of thousands of soldiers from Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio—roughly a third of volunteer troops from those states—deserted their units or were absent without leave, either homesick, disgusted by the protracted war, dismayed by the Emancipation Proclamation, or all of the above.<sup>19</sup> Thousands of family members and friends encouraged soldiers to desert and hid them from arrest.<sup>20</sup> US Army commanders, concerned about maintaining troop strength and effectiveness, took vigorous steps to halt desertion. Among other measures, commanders throughout the region established detective bureaus to find, arrest, and return deserters to their regiments. These detectives—both hired civilians and soldiers detailed from their units—scoured the Northern landscape looking for absentees. Army and civil

16. *Millersburg (OH) Holmes County Farmer*, Feb. 19, 1863.

17. *Millersburg (OH) Holmes County Farmer*, Apr. 2, 9, and 23, 1863. For a study of coercion of rank-and-file soldiers in the Union Army, see Jonathan W. White, *Emancipation, the Union Army, and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ., 2014).

18. *Holmes County Farmer*, Sept. 18, 1862; Oct. 16 and 23, 1862; Nov. 13, 1862.

19. Maj. Gen. Henry W. Halleck to Edwin M. Stanton, Feb. 18, 1863, vol. 11, Edwin M. Stanton Papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC. Halleck reported that of total army strength of 790,000, 282,000 soldiers were absent from their commands. A scholar of desertion notes that while “no attempt was made to estimate the exact proportion of those who were sick or on furlough, it is certain that a large portion were deserters and stragglers.” Ella Lonn, *Desertion during the Civil War* (Gloucester, MA: American Historical Association, 1928; repr., Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1998), 151.

20. Cashin, “Deserters, Civilians, and Draft Resistance in the North,” 271–79.

authorities encountered violent resistance when officers attempted to capture deserters. In one instance in March 1863, hundreds of armed men in Noble County, Ohio, banded together to prevent a deputy US marshal from arresting deserters, prompting officials to send troops.<sup>21</sup> Commanders also learned that civilians were arming themselves with the intent to resist authorities. Officers directed detectives to seek out information on secret arms shipments in the Old Northwest. Brig. Gen. Horatio G. Wright, commander of the Department of the Ohio, issued an order forbidding the sale and shipment of arms and ammunition without army permission throughout his command's multistate region. His successor, Maj. Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside, continued the policy. Despite the army's efforts, reports flooded headquarters that armed citizens declared that they would protect deserters and resist the draft under the Enrollment Act.<sup>22</sup>

The new law established an extensive bureaucracy called the Provost Marshal General's Bureau. Housed in the War Department, the Bureau posted officers in every county to identify, select, round up, and send drafted men or substitutes to the front. In addition, it hired hundreds of "special agents"—also officially called secret agents, detectives, and spies—to hunt down deserters. These agents worked closely with military commanders to locate absentees and those who harbored them. Soon government agents were watching citizens' movements, listening to their conversations, and reading their private mail throughout the North to find and capture deserters. The Bureau organized in Ohio in May 1863. The War Department selected Col. Edwin A. Parrott of Dayton, an experienced commander of volunteer troops as well as businessman, as the Bureau's man in Ohio. By late May he had appointed district provost marshals, who in turn hired county officers, special agents, clerks, and enrollment officers. These last would go door to door to collect information on draft-eligible men.<sup>23</sup>

During that month, General Burnside's arrest and military commission trial of former Democratic Congressman Clement L. Vallandigham for disloyal speech roiled Ohio. Probably the most outspoken Northern opponent of

21. Towne, *Surveillance and Spies in the Civil War*, 63–64.

22. For example, see Capt. R. D. Mussey to Brig. Gen. Horatio G. Wright, Mar. 13, 1863, in Record Group 393, Records of US Army Continental Commands, Part I, Entry 3489, Registers of Letters Received, vol. 2:334, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC [hereafter cited NARA-W].

23. For the creation of the espionage apparatus of the Provost Marshal General's Bureau, see Towne, *Surveillance and Spies in the Civil War*, 89–115.



war to coerce the Confederate states back into the Union, Vallandigham had been observed by army officers (sent incognito as detectives) giving a speech in Mount Vernon, Knox County, highly critical of both the Lincoln administration and the army. On hearing of his arrest, Vallandigham's followers in his hometown of Dayton erupted in a destructive riot that was quelled only by military force. Troops patrolled the city under martial law. A military tribunal convicted the politician and banished him to rebel lines. Early in June, delegates at the Democratic State Convention held in Columbus selected the exile as their candidate for governor. Vallandigham soon made his way to Canada and conducted his campaign in absentia, a living symbol to Ohio Democrats of government tyranny at the hands of the army and Republican leaders.<sup>24</sup>

## II.

Throughout these weeks tensions were high in Ohio. Colonel Parrott, in his State House headquarters near the office of Gov. David Tod, a lifelong Democrat who ran for governor on the Union Party ticket in 1861, worked to enroll the state quietly and efficiently. Reports from his district officers spoke of *concerted* plans to resist the enrollment. One provost marshal revealed that "extensive organizations" existed in his northwest Ohio district "whose express and avowed object is to resist, not only the draft, but also the enrolling officer."<sup>25</sup> Similar reports reached the governor's desk. One, from the former president of Kenyon College in Knox County, declared, "Almost all the male population are armed & united to protect the deserters & resist conscription."<sup>26</sup> Soon, in early June, reports arrived from all over the state that enrollment officers had been assaulted and obstructed by organized groups. Ohio newspapers reported that Maj. Lucius V. Bierce, Parrott's deputy, led troops to arrest enrollment resisters in Morrow County, where persons blew horns to signal fellow insurgents until Bierce threatened to shoot the next person who did so.<sup>27</sup>

Capt. James L. Drake, who superintended Ohio's 14th District (which encompassed Ashland, Holmes, Lorrain, Medina, and Wayne counties) for the

24. Klement, *The Limits of Dissent*, 150–256.

25. Capt. Daniel S. Brown to Parrott, May 25, 1863, RG 110, E 4455 Letters Received, box 1, NARA-C.

26. Charles P. McIlvaine to David Tod, Apr. 1, 1863, Gov. David Tod Papers, MS 306, MIC-999, roll 22, Ohio History Connection, Columbus, OH.

27. *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, June 5 and 6, 1863; Sterling, "Civil War Draft Resistance in the Middle West," 200.

Bureau, also reported organized plans to obstruct the enrollment. A calm, confident, middle-aged War Democrat and resident of Washington Township in the northwest corner of Holmes County, he had commanded a company in the 23rd Ohio Volunteer Infantry regiment until a shell fragment knocked him down at Antietam. He resigned his commission and returned to his farm. Appointed to the Bureau, from his district offices in Wooster on June 1 he wrote to Parrott that “this morning” he was “well and credibly informed” that in Richland Township, Holmes County, persons were “organizing a company with the avowed purpose of resisting the draft.” The group had even secured a small (“4–6 lb”) artillery piece and sent it to Napoleon, the township’s largest village (today called Glenmont). He concluded that “the cannon going to the same neighborhood that the company is being organized has a meaning or looks suspicious.”<sup>28</sup> Parrott immediately ordered Drake to have an agent watch the organization. His detective “must work himself into [the] company and explore it. Have affi[davits] made of overt acts and send to this office.”<sup>29</sup> The district officer anticipated Parrott’s directive, appointing three special agents to prowl the area.<sup>30</sup>

Troubles began promptly. At this time, enrollment officer Elias W. Robison, a prosperous farmer from Washington Township, Holmes County, began to canvas Richland Township, in the southwestern corner of the county. A hilly and rocky area, the 1860 population census shows that the residents who farmed its poor soils were primarily native-born Americans, most born in Ohio and Pennsylvania, with a large minority of foreign-born immigrants from France, Switzerland, and various German states. Most residents were Protestant Christians, but Catholics had a small parish church in Napoleon. Some still spoke French at home. Amish and Mennonite Christians—related Anabaptist sects who conscientiously opposed military service—had a numerous presence in the county, but they resided mostly in its eastern portion; there is no evidence that these nonresisting groups participated in the Holmes County violence.<sup>31</sup> On June 5, Robison and a local farmer rode to the Wolf Creek Valley house of Peter Stuber, a young farmer born in Baden, Ger-

28. Capt. James L. Drake to Parrott, June 1, 1863, RG 110, E 4833 Letters Sent 14th District, vol. 1:1, NARA-C.

29. Parrott to Drake, June 2, 1863, RG 110, E 4447, Register of Letters Sent, vol. 1:70, NARA-C.

30. Three letters of Drake to Isaac Tipton, William Critchfield, and Benjamin Bowers, all June 1, 1863, RG 110 E 4833, vol. 1:1–2, NARA-C.

31. See James O. Lehman and Steven M. Nolt, *Mennonites, Amish, and the American Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2007), 172–73. For a map of Mennonite and Amish settlements and churches in eastern Holmes County, see Lehman and Nolt, *Mennonites*, 104.



miles,” reported Drake, “we were surrounded by between fifty and one hundred armed men, who overpowered us and rescued our prisoners.”<sup>33</sup>

Drake’s straightforward report did not relate significant details of the rescue. According to a reliable account written by the federal Treasury Department’s revenue agent for the district, Alexander C. McMillen, who participated in subsequent government efforts to suppress the uprising, as soon as the arrests occurred “signal guns” sounded all around. “In a few moments, men could be seen riding on horseback, at full speed, giving the alarm. One of the prisoners told Capt. Drake that he knew they would be rescued.” “Squads of armed men” appeared on all sides. A messenger for Drake galloped up to report that the posse would be shot unless the prisoners were released. Greiner, one of the prisoners, sent a note to the “different crowds” telling them to disperse, but they would not heed him. Accompanied by John A. Anderson, the deputy provost marshal for Holmes County, Greiner went ahead to talk with some of the armed men, “assuring them that the prisoners would have a fair trial in the civil courts.” The men agreed to let the posse and prisoners proceed. But as the posse came close to Napoleon *another* “one hundred armed men” rode up and surrounded them, and, after discoursing on constitutional rights and calling themselves “secesh of the worst kind,” the riders made several demands. They insisted that Drake “take the oath” and resign his provost marshal position. He was to “pledge his word that he would never attempt to make any more arrests in Holmes county,” and the prisoners were to be taken from federal authority and handed to the Holmes County sheriff, a Democrat. Finally, he was to surrender his revolver. Drake, according to McMillen, refused the demands. “You have been talking about the constitutional rights of democrats,” Drake replied. “I have a constitutional right to carry this revolver, and *I am democrat enough to carry it; you can shoot me, you can murder me, you have the power to do it; but you cannot intimidate me, you cannot make me do a mean cowardly act* [italics original].” Failing in their demands, the armed men carried away the prisoners from the wagon at gunpoint and beat the wagon driver, saying, “he knew he was violating his oath.”<sup>34</sup>

33. Drake to Col. James B. Fry, June 11, 1863, RG 110, E 4833, vol. 1:5, NARA-C. One account identifies the wagon driver as Daniel Stuber. Garber, *The Holmes County Rebellion*, 5. According to a well-sourced Cleveland newspaper, Drake found the four men holed up in the “upper story of a house, and armed.” He assured them that they would have a civil trial, and they surrendered peacefully. *Daily Cleveland Herald*, June 18, 1863.

34. Letter of A. C. McMillen, n.d., “Holmes County War,” *Mount Vernon Republican*, June 25, 1863. McMillen’s account is supported by reports in regional newspapers. The leading Republican newspaper in the Western Reserve, the *Daily Cleveland Herald*, June 12, 1863, contains a

After this incident, Drake kept Parrott apprised of Holmes County developments, reporting the next day that “several hundred men are fortifying where we had trouble yesterday.” With the sangfroid of a veteran, he characterized it as “a speck of opposition.” He asked for troops to be sent to him, adding, “I would like to lead two companies over their works.”<sup>35</sup> At this time Parrott reported to Washington that enrollment resistance erupted in four districts in north-central Ohio.<sup>36</sup> He immediately informed Drake that he would position one hundred troops nearby at Mansfield, a central point for all four districts. He applied promptly to the military commander in Columbus, Brig. Gen. John S. Mason, for 150 troops to serve for ten to twelve days, the troops to visit the counties where enrollment resistance occurred.<sup>37</sup> The general obliged by sending a portion of the 88th Ohio Volunteer Infantry regiment, “the Governor’s Guard,” which garrisoned the prisoner-of-war camp in Columbus, Camp Chase. They went by train to Mansfield with five days’ rations and forty rounds of ammunition for each soldier.<sup>38</sup>

Hundreds of armed men were already present during the rescue near Napoleon; in the following days many more insurgents streamed into Richland

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communication from W of Holmes County adding, “The number engaged in the rescue I have heard variously estimated at from fifteen to fifty, all armed with rifles and pistols. The untterrified of that township, and, in fact, other townships in this county, say that not a man shall be forced to fight in this ‘damned Abolition war.’” W added that “A gentleman who was on the ground a short time after the rescue, states that the woods and roads in the neighborhood seemed to be swarming with armed men. He thinks he saw at least a hundred in one body, all armed with what seemed to him, new rifles.” Another nearby Republican newspaper reported that during the parlay “The promise of a civil trial in Court by a Jury for the prisoners, was disregarded, and the leaders boasted that they were *Secessionists*” [italics original]. See the *Wooster Republican*, June 18, 1863, which contains an account of events in Holmes County through the battle of June 17. In these and other accounts, which fit with surviving archival records, both the *Herald* and the *Republican* had access to federal law-enforcement and other officials for accurate information. McMillen appears to have been one of the “squirrel hunters” who accompanied the army expedition into Holmes County. See also the *Columbus Daily Ohio State Journal*, June 22, 1863. A subsequent account in the *Cleveland Herald* notes that the posse received warning from a woman that armed men would murder them. Further, it reported that “one of the prisoners [Greiner] said he presumed the news was true, for he belonged to a secret society, whose members were sworn to protect each other from arrests, and asked permission to go ahead and explain matters.” In reply to the demand for his revolver, Drake is said to reply, “You shall not have it. I will kill the first man who attempts to take it.” *Daily Cleveland Herald*, June 18, 1863.

35. Drake to Parrott, June 11 and 13, 1863, RG 110, E 4833, vol. 1:5–6, NARA-C.

36. Parrott to Fry, June 12, 1863, RG 110, E 4447, vol. 1:145, NARA-C. The four congressional districts were the 8th, 9th, 13th, and 14th districts.

37. Parrott to Drake, June 12, 1863, and Parrott to Capt. John Green, both E 110, E 4447, vol. 1:70, 90, NARA-C.

38. Green to Maj. Edwin L. Webber, June 12, 1863, RG 249, Records of the Commissary General of Prisoners, E 166, Letters Received, 1861–65, Camp Chase, OH, box 1, NARA-W. See also letter of Oscar, June 20, 1863, *Hillsborough (OH) Highland Weekly News*, July 1, 1863.

Township from other parts of Holmes County and surrounding counties. According to several accounts by soldiers and officials, armed men arrived in the area from Knox, Coshocton, Muskingum, and other Ohio counties. War correspondent Joseph B. McCullagh, taking a break from covering Gen. U. S. Grant's Vicksburg campaign for the *Cincinnati Daily Commercial* under the nom de plume Mack, caught up with the military expedition to Holmes and reported that "there were between twelve and thirteen hundred insurgents in the rebel camps on last Sunday [June 14], where they had two or three speeches, and a preacher by the name of Hastings preached a rebel sermon."<sup>39</sup> A soldier, S. T. S., who took part in the expedition, related that prisoner interrogations revealed that the success of the rescue "flattered" the resisters and "increased their numbers." As the ranks of the armed men grew, they "threatened loyal families" in the area, "held meetings, cheered Vallandigham and Jeff. Davis, [and] heard inflammatory, disloyal speeches from the butternut leaders of the county." He suggested their force peaked on Saturday, June 13, when a speaker from Millersburg told them to "Throw aside your revolvers and get rifles of longer range and you will not be troubled with the draft." They were "maddened with whisky and beer [and] spoiling for a fight."<sup>40</sup> Expanding their reach, resisters assaulted and drove away enrolling officers in other Holmes County townships.<sup>41</sup>

Meanwhile, Drake wrote to the US attorney in Cleveland to start the paperwork for subpoenas and indictments in federal court for violation of the Enrollment Act.<sup>42</sup> On Monday, June 15, he reported to Columbus headquarters his latest intelligence that the "insurgents" numbered "not less than six to nine hundred" men. Significantly, he added that "I have had a man in their

39. Letter of Mack, June 18, 1863, *Columbus Daily Ohio State Journal*, June 22, 1863. As his source for information on the insurgents' strength and activities in camp, he cited Col. Daniel French, formerly commander of the 65th Ohio and 120th Ohio Volunteer Infantry regiments. A Holmes County War Democrat, French was one of the negotiators who spoke with resisters on June 18. French also supplied the figure of nine hundred men "armed and ready for resistance." For a biography of the famous Civil War correspondent and Gilded Age journalist, see Charles C. Clayton, *"Little Mack": Joseph B. McCullagh of the St. Louis Globe-Democrat* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1969). The *Farmer* gives hints as to the identity of pastor Hastings. In April 1863 it notes that the Rev. J. Hastings was a new subscriber, and in September the newspaper announced that "the Rev. J. Hastings will preach in the Disciples Church" on Sunday. See *Holmes County Farmer*, Apr. 9, 1863; Sept. 10, 1863.

40. Letter of S. T. S., June 20, 1863, *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, June 22, 1863. The report is dated at Columbus. Who the writer was cannot be determined.

41. Drake to Capt. Thomas C. Bunker, June 23, 1863, RG 110, E 4833, vol. 1:9, NARA-C; Drouhard, *It Don't Look Right for the Times*, 12–13.

42. *Daily Cleveland Herald*, June 18, 1863.

camp, he left it yesterday at noon.” He revised his previous understanding that the armed men had constructed fortifications. “They are not intrenched [*sic*] but intend to Bushwhack. They are strong along [a line] from east to west on the Hills of Wolf Creek about four or five miles.” Thus, he described a widely dispersed force. Drake opined that “this rebellion must be put down at once or Holmes given up.” He put forward a plan for federal troops to strike the “rebel position” at dawn, “when the most of them could be captured.” He shared intelligence that local political leaders had agitated their followers and lost control of the situation. “The men that caused this little Rebellion,” he reported, “are trying to put it down or control it but to no purpose as yet.”<sup>43</sup> The next day, Parrott digested Drake’s report and requested that General Mason send three hundred additional troops with five-days’ rations to Holmes County to accompany a US marshal to arrest the law-breakers.<sup>44</sup>

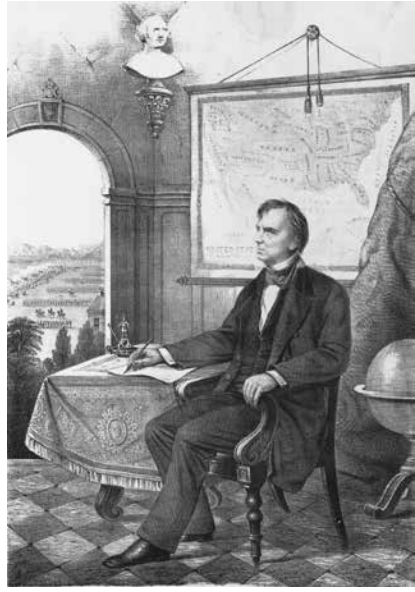
Both military and civil authorities agreed that the uprising required a strong military response. Brig. Gen. Jacob D. Cox, commander of the District of Ohio, traveled up to Columbus from his Cincinnati headquarters to confer with Governor Tod about sending an expeditionary force to Holmes County. Each drafted instructions to Mason. The governor composed a “timely warning” to the armed men to disperse, “or the consequence to yourselves will be destructive in the extreme.”<sup>45</sup> In instructions for the expedition’s commander, Tod asked that “before firing upon the party,” troops send his warning to the insurgents under flag of truce. But “should the rioters refuse to give obedience to my request, then show them no quarter whatever.”<sup>46</sup> Sending reinforcements from Camp Dennison near Cincinnati, Cox ordered Mason to assemble a battalion under the “most experienced & discreet field officer available.” On encountering the “lawless persons,” the commander was to send the governor’s warning among them. If they yielded the June 5 resistors and dispersed, no punishment would be meted out. If the insurgent force was small, the battalion was to capture it whole “without bloodshed,” if possible.

43. Drake to Parrott, June 15, 1863, RG 110, E 4833, vol. 1:8, NARA-C. Local historians suggest the spy was David Tipton, brother of special agent Isaac Tipton. See Drouhard, *It Don’t Look Right for the Times*, 21–22, and Vance, “Holmes County Rebellion—Fort Fizzle,” 36. Cleveland law-enforcement officials received information that there were “no fortifications” or “entrenched camp visible.” *Daily Cleveland Herald*, June 19, 1863. While Drake reported a widely dispersed insurgent force, Holmes County folklore contends that armed men congregated at the fortress-like stone house of “Lorenzo Blanchard” [Laurant Blanchat]. Kenneth Wheeler repeats this shibboleth. See Wheeler, “Local Autonomy and Civil War Draft Resistance,” 154.

44. Parrott to Green, June 16, 1863, RG 110, E 4447, vol. 1:90, NARA-C.

45. Quoted in *Daily Cleveland Herald*, June 18, 1863.

46. Tod to Brig. Gen. John S. Mason, June 16, 1863, RG 249, E 166, box 1, NARA-W.



*Left:* Jacob D. Cox (Courtesy of the Library of Congress). *Right:* David Tod (Courtesy of the Library of Congress)

But should they refuse to hand over the resistors or disperse, “their camp will be assaulted with the utmost vigor and the insurgents captured or killed at all hazards, so that an effective lesson may be once for all given to all rebels at home.”<sup>47</sup>

Mason followed his orders and cobbled together a battalion from what was available in Columbus. The main body consisted of 230 enlisted men of the 3rd Ohio Volunteer Infantry regiment, captured during “Streight’s Raid” into northern Alabama and paroled, idling at Camp Chase. As they lacked officers, the general assigned captains from the 88th Ohio. A company of fifty Ohio Volunteer Sharpshooters from Camp Dennison joined them. A newly formed section of the 22nd Ohio Independent Battery, armed with two six-pounder rifled guns under Capt. Henry M. Neil, an experienced artillerist, completed the force. Mason assigned Lt. Col. William Wallace, a seasoned veteran of the 15th Ohio Volunteer Infantry regiment, to command. The battalion boarded train cars and departed on the night of June 16.

The train arrived at Mansfield at about daylight the next morning, June 17, to pick up the two companies of the 88th Ohio sent there days before. As

47. Brig. Gen. Jacob D. Cox to Mason, June 16, 1863, RG 249, E 166, box 1, NARA-W.



well, Captain Drake and John Anderson, the Holmes County deputy provost marshal, along with about twenty “squirrel hunters” from Wooster, joined them there. They rode on and arrived at Lakeville Station in northwestern Holmes County about two hours later, where they unloaded. All told, about 420 troops formed the battalion, accompanied by some loyal Holmes County residents. Setting out south, they marched four miles to breakfast at Nashville. From there Drake sent out local residents as scouts to “collect some knowledge.” Leaving the village around 9 A.M., the troops marched south. “The day was hot.” The din of the seventeen-year cicadas, which had emerged from the ground days before, echoed through the forests.<sup>48</sup>

One soldier, Oscar of Company D, 88th Ohio, recorded observations of the march through hostile territory. The houses they passed were devoid of men, he wrote; “their better halves never knew where they were. [The men] had all been gone a week or two weeks” and the women did not know when they would return, adding that they had been told “the Union soldiers had come down to kill all the women and children and burn their houses.” Reaching Napoleon about 4 P.M., Oscar took heart in a small show of patriotism. “There were Union flags displayed from two or three houses as we came through the town, which the boys cheered vociferously.” Departing town southward, the column encountered “obstacles”—felled trees—in the road meant to slow them. “The deserted look of the houses and an occasional blockade of the road encouraged us to push forward with new vigor,” he noted.<sup>49</sup>

Colonel Wallace learned in Napoleon that the insurgents were “in force about two miles to the south.” He led his troops up a steep, high hill covered by dense forest and farm fields and ordered Captain Moon of the 88th Ohio and forty men of the 3rd Ohio forward as an advance guard to find the main camp. About a mile and half out of town, Moon’s men, deployed as skirmishers, came under fire from men behind logs and rock piles on the Jackson farm, next to the widow Workman’s farm. The troops returned fire and charged. “About twenty men sprung from their hiding places and ran two were captured with arms in their hands,” Wallace reported. Moon and his skirmishers advanced farther and halted.<sup>50</sup> “We soon had the satisfaction of seeing about

48. Drake to Parrott, June 26, 1863, RG 110, E 4833, vol. 1:10–11, NARA-C.

49. Letter of Oscar, *Hillsborough Highland Weekly News*, July 2, 1863. Oscar might have been Sgt. Samuel O. Bailey, a twenty-three-year-old farm laborer from Highland County. Oscar also commemorated the Holmes County battle in a poem, “The Battle of Black Creek.” See Letter of Oscar, *Hillsborough Highland Weekly News*, July 30, 1863.

50. Lt. Col. William Wallace to Green, June 20, 1863, RG 249, E 166, box 1, NARA-W, published in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and*

60 of the enemy—divided in squads upon a hillside, and playing picket guard the best they knew how,” reported Oscar, one of Moon’s soldiers. A stone fence separated the opposing forces.<sup>51</sup> Stationing his company in opposite corners of a field in front of the fence, the captain went back to report to Wallace. The colonel brought up the balance of his force in line of battle, which came under fire from men behind rock piles on their right. The battalion returned fire and charged “with a yell.” The insurgents “sprung from the ground and fled.”<sup>52</sup> Having been fired on, Wallace had no opportunity to send in the governor’s message under flag of truce, as ordered.

With the help of local “good Union men,” troops pursued the fleeing fighters. Immediate reports of casualties were mixed; the soldiers thought they had inflicted heavy losses on the assembly. In the end, however, reports confirmed only two insurgents were wounded. In his official after-action report, Wallace noted two men captured in Moon’s first assault and several more in the charge by the main body of troops.<sup>53</sup> Drake reported “some 8 or 10 men captured in arms, two of them belonging to that party that had rescued the prisoners from me on the 10th.”<sup>54</sup> S. T. S confirmed that Moon’s initial charge yielded two prisoners, and the subsequent charge added seven more, “the rest fleeing over the brow of the hill and down into a thick woods.” Two reports gave the names of the two wounded men. Twenty-one-year-old Benjamin Brown of Richland Township was hit by buckshot and escaped, but two days later surrendered to have his wounds treated by the army surgeon. During the fight, George Butler, of Killbuck Township, mistaking advancing government forces for resistor reinforcements, rode up on horseback and flashed a sign to them “anticipating an answer; they ordered him to surrender himself; seeing his mistake he turned about and rode off, our men firing upon him; a ball passed through his thigh;

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*Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1897), ser. 1, vol. 23, pt. 1, 395–96; letter of S. T. S., *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, June 22, 1863; Drake to Parrott, June 26, 1863, RG 110, E 4833, vol. 1:10–11, NARA-C.

51. Letter of Oscar, *Hillsborough Highland Weekly News*, July 1, 1863.

52. Wallace to Green, June 20, 1863, RG 249, E 166, box 1, NARA-W; letter of S. T. S., *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, June 22, 1863.

53. Wallace to Green, June 20, 1863, RG 249, E 166, box 1, NARA-W. Before composing his official report, Wallace dashed off a brief note to Mason to report dispersing the “insurgents.” Wallace to Mason, June 19, 1863, RG 249, E 166, box 1, NARA-W.

54. Drake to Parrott, June 26, 1863, RG 110, E 4833, vol. 1:10–11, NARA-C; letter of Oscar, *Hillsborough Highland Weekly News*, July 2, 1863. Drake’s report of June 26 notes that on June 16 Captain Bunker’s company of the 88th Ohio was already in Holmes County under Drake’s orders to suppress resistance. With this force and some “squirrel hunters” from Wooster, Drake intended to attack the insurgents in Richland Township when orders arrived to meet the train carrying Wallace’s command.

he however escaped.”<sup>55</sup> The federal troops and “squirrel hunters” suffered no casualties. Wallace brought up his artillery to shell the woods but demurred. He opted to camp on the “ground said to have been the Hd. Quarters of the disaffected” for the night. A prisoner told them more armed men were in the woods to the east and, to the west, “a[nother] force would come from Knox County, during the night.” The soldiers expected battle to continue the next day.<sup>56</sup>

While troops prepared to renew the fight, diplomatic efforts brought a cessation of violence. During Wednesday night, William Greiner, one of the original rescued men and who admitted to belonging to a secret society, fled the scene of battle in Richland Township and made his way twenty-four miles to Millersburg, the county seat, to seek reinforcements. But Democratic leaders there who had stoked the flames of revolt were now spooked by news of the military victory. They counseled him to return to the insurgents and “tell them to give themselves up.” According to Mack’s account, based on interviews and interrogations, “Greiner became exasperated, threatened to lay the town in ashes, and upbraided them with hollow-hearted duplicity—stating that they had been the means of getting them into trouble, and now to save their own necks they were going to abandon them to their fate.” Instead, to avoid bringing death and destruction to their town, that night “influential men” of the town appointed a bipartisan committee to go to the battlefield to “adjust the difficulty.”<sup>57</sup> The next morning, June 18, the committee reached Colonel Wallace’s camp. Wallace reported that they offered to “deliver up” the original four men who assaulted Robison. He agreed and gave them the

55. Letter of S. T. S., *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, June 22, 1863; letter of Mack, June 18, 1863, *Columbus Daily Ohio State Journal*, June 22, 1863. McMillen confirmed the circumstances of Butler’s wound: “One man mistook a squad of boys from Wooster, who were thrown out as skirmishers, for a squad of his own men, and came riding up in great haste, and cried out, ‘give the sign?’ When he discovered his mistake, he started to run; the boys hollowed, ‘we’ll give you the sign,’ they fired, two of the balls took effect in his right hip. They dressed his wound, took his knife, (which was shown me a few moments ago,) and then left.” See *Mount Vernon Republican*, June 25, 1863. Another newspaper reported that Butler was shot accidentally by an insurgent. *Daily Cleveland Herald*, June 18, 1863.

56. Letter of S. T. S., *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, June 22, 1863. A Cleveland newspaper reported that on June 18 the Republican peace commissioners “were stopped by a party of sixty or seventy Tories from Coshocton County” intent on reinforcing the assembly. According to the commissioners, these armed men had heard that troops had “burned Napoleon, slaughtered the men, and outraged the women. They were filled with fury and bad whiskey in equal quantities.” *Daily Cleveland Herald*, June 19, 1863.

57. Letter of Mack, *Columbus Daily Ohio State Journal*, June 22, 1863. A Cleveland newspaper reported that Greiner “had been to Millersburg several times in hopes to get the aid promised, but as he could get no satisfaction, he threatened the insurgents should come up and burn the town.” *Daily Cleveland Herald*, June 19, 1863.

day to do it.<sup>58</sup> “The day was spent waiting for the result, [former Democratic Congressman D. P.] Leadbetter and [Col. Daniel] French went back and forth from the mob to camp, settling questions that were being raised.” Friday morning, “a little before noon,” Leadbetter and French brought in rescued prisoners along with “one or two ringleaders.” They pledged to turn over other perpetrators and further guaranteed that the draft would be unmolested and deserters “taken without opposition.”<sup>59</sup>

Though taken up with negotiations, the 18th was a busy day for the troops. They gathered information, interrogated prisoners before sending them to Cleveland for trial, and took stock of the uprising. Oscar boasted that “their band is entirely broken up and they are hiding among the rocks like scared quails.”<sup>60</sup> S. T. S. remarked on copious supplies to feed the assembled insurgents found in various camps in the area: “large quantities of bread—army bread and meat prepared for the camp, far beyond the necessities of a private family.”<sup>61</sup> War correspondent Mack also noted the bounteous supplies found at the “Widow Workman’s” farm, “L. Blanchard’s” [*sic* Blanchat] house, “and other locations.” The armed men also “had in their possession four small howitzers, about eighteen inches long, placed on different hills, which they used for signal guns on the approach of danger.”<sup>62</sup> Soldiers and others members of the expedition made derogatory observations about the local population. McMillen wrote that the prisoners “could not talk English, when they were first taken; but next morning all could talk very good English.”<sup>63</sup> S. T. S. noted that they were “mostly of the most ignorant French and German population, imported with all their unfitness for a republican government.” Local politicians had aroused them to violence against “war policy” during the political campaigns of the previous autumn. Speaking with soldiers, “loyal citizens” and family members of the insurgents told of the influence of “secret societies” in the community. S. T. S. also shared intelligence about the insurgents’ strength, noting that since the previous weekend, when the masses of armed

58. Wallace to Green, June 20, 1863, RG 249, E 166, box 1, NARA-W.

59. Letter of S. T. S., *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, June 22, 1863. The Republican committee members were not permitted entrance to the insurgent camps. Letter of Mack, *Columbus Daily Ohio State Journal*, June 22, 1863.

60. Letter of Oscar, *Hillsborough Highland Weekly News*, July 2, 1863.

61. Letter of S. T. S., *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, June 22, 1863.

62. Letter of Mack, *Columbus Daily Ohio State Journal*, June 22, 1863. The *Cleveland Herald* reported that “provisions were coming in by the wagon load.” As well, the armed men had four or five small cannon “posted at intervals . . . for firing signals.” *Daily Cleveland Herald*, June 18 and 19, 1863.

63. Letter of A. C. McMillen, n.d., *Mount Vernon Republican*, June 25, 1863.

men reached their peak, “their numbers grew less, until they numbered not far from two hundred.” They had “little discipline, no head,” but intended to resist the draft and protect deserters.<sup>64</sup> Mack characterized locals as a “mob” who, “although possessing property, are degraded and ignorant, and a wily politician can mould them to his will as a potter does the clay of the earth.” They lived in an “isolated, wild, and hilly country,” with “prejudices strong and passions untamed,” and were “almost ungovernable.” He concluded that it had been a “formidable outbreak,” but timely and judicious government action had prevented “serious consequences.”<sup>65</sup>

Timely action had indeed ended the uprising. With the dispersal of the assembly, capture of several, and transfer of the rescued prisoners, Wallace removed most of his troops promptly from the county to lessen tensions and “preserve the peace.”<sup>66</sup> He sent troops to neighboring counties where reports said resistors blocked the enrollment. Leaving one company of the 88th Ohio to assist Drake and capture deserters, he sent his artillery and the Sharpshooters back to Columbus. The colonel led the 3rd Ohio on to Warsaw, Coshocton County, to guard enrolling officers. There troops had a run-in with “Rebels some of whom hurrah’d for Jeff Davis [after which] the soldiers broke for them.”<sup>67</sup> The Holmes County uprising had attracted hundreds of armed

64. Letter of S. T. S., *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, June 22, 1863. The *Wooster Republican* of June 18, 1863, reported that troops met no more than two hundred to three hundred armed men. Captain Drake had initially reported that the cannon for the organized group in Richland Township was consigned to a “Frenchman” in Napoleon. See Drake to Parrott, June 1, 1863, RG 110, E 4833, vol. 1:1, NARA-C. One account says that after the battle the insurgents “skulk[ed] in the woods in squads of twenty or forty, having no leader, no concert of action.” *Daily Cleveland Herald*, June 19, 1863.

65. Letter of Mack, *Columbus Daily Ohio State Journal*, June 22, 1863.

66. Wallace to Green, June 20, 1863, RG 249, E 166, box 1, NARA-W. Shortly thereafter, Congressman Leadbetter wrote to Governor Tod to report efforts to ward off further violence. He complained that the soldiers entered houses and stole property. “The citizens will bear it no longer.” Leadbetter to Tod, June 22, 1863, OR, series 3, vol. 3:403–4. In his reports, Wallace reported that soldiers of the 3rd Ohio and “Volunteer Citizens committed some excesses which are much to be regretted,” owing to the fact that the officers from the 88th Ohio did not know the men. Wallace to Mason, June 19, 1863, RG 249, E 166, box 1, NARA-W. He also added that the soldiers’ “irregularities . . . were owing more to their having campaigned in the south” than willful disobedience. Wallace to Green, June 20, 1863, RG 249, E 166, box 1, NARA-W. Both Mack and S. T. S. acknowledged that soldiers had stolen property and been “disorderly.”

67. Wallace to Mason, June 19, 1863, RG 249, E 166, box 1, NARA-W. Unionists invited the company left in Holmes County to Mount Holly in Knox County for a picnic, where Captain Bunker gave a speech. *Mount Vernon Republican*, July 2, 1863. The Republican newspaper in Coshocton reported that “rebels” in Perry Township attacked enrolling officers with “pistols and knives, requiring” troops to complete the enrollment. *Coshocton Age*, July 2, 1863.

men from several neighboring counties. Following the armed men back to their homes helped to suppress further violence throughout the region.

### III.

Sources show that the number of armed men assembled in Holmes County peaked at over one thousand over the weekend of June 13–14. The successful rescue on June 10 encouraged armed men to flock to the scene to take a stand against what they saw as government tyranny. That Sunday might have been the day when many men, free from farm labors, traveled to Richland Township to show solidarity with local resistors and defiance to the government. They received encouragement from Holmes County politicians and preachers who, with stirring rhetoric, advocated resistance to the Lincoln administration. But in a hot and dry mid-June, with wheat harvests imminent, farmers could not linger far from home. They returned to their farms, leaving locals—about two hundred armed men, still a formidable force—to deal with the expected government response. Their zeal is shown by the significant distances they traveled to reach the southwest corner of Holmes County. Men from adjacent counties would have ridden by horse or wagon twenty, thirty, forty miles or more over hilly topography and rutted roads. Camping rough in the woods further displayed their determination.

While extraordinary in scope and the level of violence, the Holmes County uprising was not unique to the region. A large rising just over the county line in neighboring Knox County, a day later, showed connections to the one in Richland Township. Indeed, the Knox County incident involved many of the same armed men who participated in the Holmes County affair before returning home to fan the flames of violent draft resistance.<sup>68</sup>

In early June, at the same time as the Holmes County troubles, the Bureau's district provost marshal for the 13th District (comprising Coshocton, Knox, Licking, and Muskingum counties), Capt. John A. Sinnet, reported draft enrollment resistance in three of his four counties. Armed men had assaulted enrollment officers or chased them away with threats of violence. Two townships each in Licking and Coshocton counties saw resistance; no less than six townships in Knox County reported "disturbances." The "center

68. Robert Sterling's survey of draft enrollment resistance overlooks the large uprising around Bladensburg, Knox County. Sterling, "Civil War Draft Resistance in the Middle West," 200, 204–5. One local historian has taken note of Knox County events. See Drouhard, *It Don't Look Right for the Times*, 11–12, 20–21.

of opposition” was Bladensburg, a village in Jackson Township, Knox County. Colonel Parrott in Columbus ordered Sinnet to request troops from General Mason. On June 11, about thirty troops arrived at Newark, where district offices were located, to be called out as needed.<sup>69</sup> On June 16, another fifty troops came up from Columbus. Sinnet sent the combined force to Bladensburg, where, he observed, a “large body of insurgents” was causing “serious difficulties.” The troops went with orders to guard enrollment officers and make arrests of drafted men, deserters, “and all prominent men implicated in resisting the enrolment.” On Thursday, June 18, with eighty troops in tow, an enrolling officer completed Harrison Township. That day, however, Sinnet reported, “a large force of malcontents” massed at nearby Bladensburg, “variously estimated at from 600 to 1000” and “emboldened by the reports from Holmes County.” They “declared that no further enrolment should be made.” Overwhelmed, the lieutenant commanding the troops sought “safety in a strong position for defense,” retreating several miles to Gambier, the home of Kenyon College. However, later that day news of the military victory over the Holmes County assembly reached Bladensburg, thirty-five miles distant from the battleground. The tables quickly turned. “Upon information of the dispersion of the disaffected at Napoleon . . . by Col. Wallace, the Bladensburg disaffected also dispersed,” Sinnet dryly reported. Like the Millersburg gentry who worked to stop the fighting in Holmes County, by Friday morning, June 19, “prominent friends of the insurgents” from several townships in Knox County “sent word for the enrolling officers to visit their townships and take the enrolment; which was done without further trouble.” But resisters in Bladensburg remained defiant, requiring troops to escort enrollment officers to complete their rounds, this time without incident.<sup>70</sup> With Knox County settled, troops proceeded to Coshocton and Licking counties to finish enrollments there. In all, seven townships (of ninety-two) in Sinnet’s four-county district required military escorts to complete enrollments.<sup>71</sup> Thus, the appearance of a large mass of armed men successfully intimidated the small

69. Capt. John A. Sinnet to Parrott, June 8, 1863, Sinnet to Parrott, June 9, 1863, Sinnet to Parrott, June 13, 1863, Sinnet to Israel Underwood and Isaac Hadley, June 16, 1863, all RG 110, E 4807, Letters Sent, 14, 19, 28–29, 35, NARA-C.

70. Sinnet to Fry, June 20, 1863, Sinnet to Parrott, June 23, 1863, RG 110, E 4807, 48–49, 55–58, NARA-C.

71. Sinnet to Fry, June 30, 1863, RG 110, E 4807, 68–69, NARA-C. The Republican newspapers in Knox County made only brief mention of enrollment violence in several townships. See *Mount Vernon Republican*, June 25, 1863, and *Knox County Express*, n.d., quoted in *Zanesville Daily Courier*, June 23, 1863.

troop force at Bladensburg, but news of military victory over the insurgents near Napoleon quickly turned the tide in favor of the government.

Democratic newspapers in the region gave attention to the “alleged organized resistance” in Holmes, but mainly played down its revolutionary character. Accounts suggested that Robison had provoked uproar by making lewd comments to women. The source of anger “was not a political matter,” and the “disaffected” included Republicans as well as Democrats. Moreover, “Abolitionists” in Millersburg obstructed efforts by Democrats to reach a settlement.<sup>72</sup> Curiously, the *Holmes County Farmer* published no reports of the initial assault, rescue, or the battle near Napoleon in its editions of June 11 and 18. On June 25, editor Estill finally took notice of the astonishing events to invent a fiction. He echoed extant Democratic accounts highlighting Robison’s “brutality” to women, the participation of Republicans, and the desire of Millersburg’s “Abolitionists . . . to see a civil war inaugurated here that would result in fearful destruction of life and property.” He acknowledged the arrest of the men who assaulted Robison and their subsequent rescue by “some fifty persons.” But he reversed the sequence of events when he wrote that “all was then quiet until Wednesday,” June 17, when troops arrived and began to cause mayhem. “Hearing of the arrival of the soldiers,” he averred, “several hundred” citizens of “Richland and adjoining townships in Knox and Coshocton counties . . . assembled to protect their neighbors from arrest and danger.” Republican accounts, especially those of the *Daily Cleveland Herald*, were base lies, he stated.<sup>73</sup> Democratic newspapers throughout Ohio and other states reprinted Estill’s and the other misleading accounts. Similarly, Knox County’s Democratic sheet omitted mention of the assembly of

72. *Wooster Wayne County Democrat*, June 18, 1863, and *Cleveland Daily Plain Dealer*, June 20, 1863. The account published in the Cleveland Democratic newspaper stated categorically, “There were no cannons, no entrenchments, no drilled forces, nor anything of the kind.” However, later that summer the Wooster Democratic paper belied that claim when it noted a “sad accident” that occurred with the explosion of a “small cannon . . . which had been used in Holmes County during the late troubles there, and been ‘confiscated’ by Capt. [Van Doorn] of the 16th Ohio, who sent it as a present to” Canaan Township. The explosion occurred during a recruiting rally, killing a boy and severely injuring several others. *Wooster Wayne County Democrat*, July 23, 1863. In another account, the Democratic paper in Cleveland pronounced the episode “a gigantic humbug.” *Cleveland Daily Plain Dealer*, June 22, 1863. A third account in the newspaper reported, “About a secret political organization at Napoleon . . . I learn but little, some saying that there was one for mutual protection against the abolitionists, and others not.” *Cleveland Daily Plain Dealer*, July 1, 1863.

73. *Millersburg Holmes County Farmer*, June 25, 1863. Estill attended the Democratic state convention in Columbus on June 11, 1863, which may be why he failed to notice events in Holmes County in his paper of that date. See *Millersburg Holmes County Farmer*, June 18, 1863.



one thousand armed men near Bladensburg to defy the enrollment. Instead, its editor claimed authorities sent troops to the county with the intent of provoking a collision.<sup>74</sup> In short, Democratic editors denied culpability as political leaders for the uprisings and falsely diverted blame for violence onto the presence of soldiers. While to date blame for many violent incidents in the Old Northwest involving shootings, knifings, and brawls could accurately be laid at the door of the military, soldier violence did not initiate the Holmes and Knox County uprisings.

#### IV.

With the successful quelling of massive enrollment resistance in Holmes and Knox counties, the punishment phase of the government's efforts to break the movement began. Through the winter, spring, and into summer, evidence of organization and coordination in efforts to stop the draft, aid deserters, and impede the war effort had mounted. Both civil and military officers gathered evidence of conspiracy, which they aimed to use to punish those who had led the uprisings. The army had captured a handful of the Holmes County insurgents "in arms," but authorities wished to bring more participants to justice in federal courts. As well, troops had failed to arrest participants in the Knox County incidents, especially "prominent men implicated in the resistance." That would change. Authorities quickly began to build legal cases against resisters, giving special attention to persons who had been resistance leaders. Arrests followed.

Immediately following the Holmes County uprising, state and federal civil and military officers began efforts to identify the participants. They did not limit their investigations to Holmes County, but sniffed around neighboring communities whence most insurgents came. An important Republican figure from Columbus, Joseph H. Geiger, traveled in Coshocton County by Friday, June 19, where local party men assisted him "in making inquiries as to the probable number of persons engaged in the 'Holmes County rebellion.'" Alarming reports swirled around the state capital that thousands of men had been under arms, a belief that Geiger evidently shared. A Coshocton Republican who aided Geiger made a calmer estimate, suggesting that "in my judgment there were not as many hundreds engaged as Mr. Geiger seemed to think there were thousands." He added, "I am certain that in neighborhoods

74. *Mount Vernon Democratic Banner*, June 20, 1863.

in this county where 40 + 50 were reported to have gone, the truth will show that omitting the o, the figures are about correct.” Still, visiting Warsaw, a town in the county, they saw twenty men from three different townships who had been to “the seat of war.” Usually “boisterous and demonstrative,” they were now “meek and quiet.” Geiger assembled names of insurgent leaders to be prosecuted or questioned.<sup>75</sup>

Federal authorities in Cleveland wasted no time in investigating the uprisings in Holmes and Knox counties and enrollment resistance in other counties. A grand jury of the US Circuit Court for the northern district of Ohio, empaneled since May, began hearing Holmes County witnesses on Monday, June 22. In the absence of Supreme Court Justice Noah Swayne, District Judge Hiram V. Willson presided. Enrolling Officer Elias Robison and District Provost Marshal Drake were among the first witnesses called. The first indictments for participation in the Holmes County incidents came down on June 24 for the four original resisters who assaulted Robison and were later rescued. Authorities charged them with conspiracy and assault. In the days to follow, a steady stream of grand jury witnesses appeared, and indictments for conspiracy and assault flowed forth. On June 30, thirteen Holmes County men received indictments for treason for their role in the rescue, having been part of a “great multitude of persons . . . armed and arrayed in a warlike manner.” Indicted men gave testimony to the grand jury. For example, Emanuel Bach testified shortly after his treason indictment in what was no doubt a plea-bargain exchange of information for a lesser charge. The US attorney dropped his treason charge and replaced it with conspiracy and assault. Indicted men gave themselves up to civil authorities to appear in court. After two weeks focused on Holmes County, the grand jury switched its attention to Knox County. It heard a parade of witnesses and handed down indictments. In all, forty-nine men from Holmes County and forty-two from Knox received indictments. Some of the Knox County men were implicated in the Holmes County uprising. As well, the grand jury indicted four Coshocton County men for participation in the Holmes and Knox County rebellions.<sup>76</sup>

75. James Irvine to Mason, June 19, 1863, RG 249, E 166, box 1, NARA-W. See also Wallace to Mason, June 19, 1863, *Mount Vernon Democratic Banner*, June 20, 1863. The main Democratic newspaper in Columbus published rumors that the “insurgents” numbered “from three to five thousand.” *Columbus Daily Ohio Statesman*, June 20, 1863. The main Republican newspaper also suggested that “about five thousand persons were engaged.” *Columbus Daily Ohio State Journal*, June 20, 1863.

76. See Criminal Record Book, vol. 1, 1863–74, and Circuit Court Journal, no. 3, 1862–65, Record Group 21, Circuit Court of the Northern District of Ohio, NARA-C.

Soldiers and other eyewitnesses had blamed the Democratic leadership of Holmes County for inciting followers to violence, citing the statements of captured insurgents. S. T. S. wrote that “the prisoners accused [former Congressman Leadbetter et al.] of leading them into it,” and “even utter[ed] threats of violence against them because of it.”<sup>77</sup> War correspondent Mack reported, “I heard the prisoners frequently remark that it was the party leaders that brought them into this difficulty, and that if they were out of this scrape they would never go to another political meeting.”<sup>78</sup> But federal prosecutors did not indict Leadbetter and other party moguls.

Along with identifying participants, authorities aimed to understand the organization behind the uprisings. In July, at the close of the grand jury’s term, the court released the grand jury’s “presentment,” which both Republican newspapers in Cleveland published. The report gave special attention to the recent spate of draft-resistance violations and blamed it on “secret societies.” The grand jury, it read, had “reliable information” that an organization existed in northern Ohio whose “members . . . were sworn on the Bible to protect each other and others, whether living North or South, from all drafts that might be made by the Government for soldiers—to shield all deserters from our armies from arrest, and in all practicable ways to oppose every movement of the Government to reestablish its authority over the whole country.” Members used signals to assemble or call for help, and leaders instructed members to arm themselves in any way they could and to form a “military organization.” Members who divulged information about the organization would be killed and their bodies quartered. Most of the men recently implicated in draft resistance and indicted by the jury, the report noted, were “ignorant men,” “unquestionably the dupes of more intelligent and shrewd ones” who have “so cloaked their own action . . . to escape punishment.”<sup>79</sup> In raising the issue of the existence of secret organizations in northern Ohio, US attorney Robert F. Paine and US marshal Earl Bill reprised their investigation of the Knights of the Golden Circle in 1861. At that time, they employed a detective

77. Letter of S. T. S., *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, June 22, 1863.

78. Letter of Mack, *Columbus Daily Ohio State Journal*, June 22, 1863.

79. *Daily Cleveland Herald*, July 18, 1863; *Cleveland Morning Leader*, July 20, 1863. Recent studies of the Knights of the Golden Circle include Mark A. Lause, *A Secret Society History of the Civil War* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2011); David C. Keehn, *Knights of the Golden Circle: Secret Empire, Southern Secession, Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 2013). The Democratic newspaper made only passing reference to the report, saying only that it “adverted to the state of the Country, and to many illegal and pernicious practices.” *Cleveland Daily Plain Dealer*, July 17, 1863.

who burrowed into the secret organization spread across several counties. Paine and Bill arrested a handful of persons for conspiracy. However, their effort collapsed when witnesses backed out of testifying or died.<sup>80</sup> Two years later, federal officers assembled evidence from testimony of draft officials and participants in rebellion who traded information for lesser charges.

Authorities also investigated secret shipment of arms and ammunition into the region in defiance of military edict. They perceived evidence of organized gun-smuggling networks in Ohio. Before the Holmes County uprising occurred, an investigation by the district provost marshal in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, of arms sales in the city revealed a network of merchants secretly sending guns to Millersburg, Holmes County, and New Philadelphia, Tuscarawas County. Dealers masked arms shipments by working through a "firm in the Drug business exclusively."<sup>81</sup> The officer seized "several shipments of arms to the insurrectionary district."<sup>82</sup> Shortly after the uprisings, a resident from neighboring Ashland County alerted military headquarters to the work of "disloyal men" in arming themselves. A Jeromeville merchant admitted to selling revolvers shipped to him in boxes marked "Stove Polish." Officers ordered an examination.<sup>83</sup>

80. See Towne, *Surveillance and Spies in the Civil War*, 28–32. Editor Estill of the *Holmes County Farmer* served on the federal grand jury in 1861. He commented on the jury's work and the collapse of the case against the persons arrested for conspiracy. He also claimed that the existence of the Knights of the Golden Circle was the brainchild of Republican "tricksters." *Millersburg Holmes County Farmer*, Dec. 5, 1861.

81. Capt. J. Heron Foster to Provost Marshal General of Ohio, June 16, 1863, Foster to Parrott, June 22, 1863, and Foster to J. M. Hackett, June 22, 1863, all in RG 110, E 3459, Letters and Endorsements Sent, vol. 1:27–30, National Archives and Records Administration, Philadelphia, PA. As well, Parrott asked Drake to investigate if Joseph Larwill, a Wooster attorney, sent arms to Holmes County. Parrott to Drake, June 19, 1863, RG 110, E4447, vol. 1:71, NARA-C.

82. While traveling through Pittsburgh in late June, the editor of the *Zanesville Daily Courier* visited his friend, the provost marshal, who told him of his investigation and discoveries. Other details were that "some shipments were made to Millersburg via Orrville [Ohio] and some others to New Philadelphia [Ohio]. He has the names of the parties who forwarded the orders and copies of their letters to the merchant in Pittsburgh who furnished the arms. One letter requested that they should not be marked as 'arms,' and that the merchant should not attach his card." *Zanesville Daily Courier*, July 1, 1863. The Millersburg hardware business that received the arms was Mayer & Lowther. William M. Lowther, co-owner, represented Holmes County as a delegate to the Democratic state convention in Columbus on June 11, 1863. See *Millersburg Holmes County Farmer*, June 18, 1863.

83. George Albertson to Capt. W. P. Anderson, June 19, 1863, RG 249, E 166, box 1, NARA-W. The letter contains an endorsement from General Cox to General Mason, dated June 22, ordering the latter to determine if the arms were intended for "disloyal purposes" and to seize them. In a letter printed in a Democratic newspaper, the merchant in question admitted that guns were in a box marked "stove polish." "It is not to resist law, nor to make any disturbance whatever. But sir I claim my right with other men to sell arms or any other hard-ware that I may have." Letter of B. Hilterbrant, *Ashland Union*, June 17, 1863.

Having gathered information on the uprisings and obtained indictments, in July authorities began to arrest participants outside of Holmes County. Arrests occurred by solitary deputy US marshals in some cases, while others employed heavy military escorts. Authorities spread out their arrests over the following months, perhaps as new information became available from witnesses and other sources. Among those arrested were Democratic minor officeholders and an ex-state legislator. Partisan politics may have played a part in the timing of arrests. In early October, days before state elections, a US marshal arrested three Coshocton County men of local influence, as the Democratic newspaper explained, “on some charge connected to the Napoleon raid.” Taken to Cleveland, they were admitted to bail and released. The Democratic editor smelled a rat, blaming a local War Democrat running for probate judge “who is said to have hunted up the witnesses and had them sent before the Grand Jury.” Arrests were delayed “for the express purpose of affecting the election!”<sup>84</sup> After the elections, in December, a large body of cavalry arrested several Knox County and Coshocton County men for the “affair at Bladensburg last summer.” Two of them gained release when it became clear that officers had arrested the wrong men.<sup>85</sup> In January 1864, authorities arrested a Licking County man for participation in the “Bladensburg affair.”<sup>86</sup> The Knox County Democratic editor pointed out that arrests occurred at midnight, bails were heavy, and the accused lost much time and expense. “Political malice” was at the bottom of this persecution, he opined. “It was not until Abolitionism obtained power in *free* America that arbitrary arrests and petty prosecutions of private citizens became the ‘order of the day.’”<sup>87</sup>

Indeed, if political harassment was the government’s aim, officials succeeded. Dozens of defendants hired legal counsel and made trips to Cleveland for bail and plea appearances. Starting in the fall of 1863, the court postponed their cases repeatedly to later dates (though sometimes at the request of defendants). Several Knox County defendants testified before a new grand jury. In time, US attorney Paine dropped prosecutions for many of the accused, but the treason charges for the handful of rescuers remained. In late May 1864, cases against two Holmes County defendants, Peter Rinkenberger

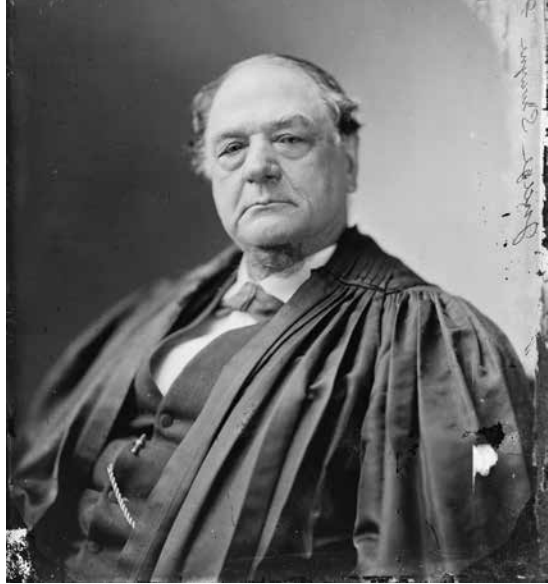
84. *Coshocton Democrat*, Oct. 7 and 14, 1863. Alexander McMillen’s account of the Holmes County uprising notes that Knox County individuals participated, “one, that has figured considerably in the county politics, and rather a leading star in his party.” *Mount Vernon Republican*, June 25, 1863.

85. *Mount Vernon Republican*, Dec. 9, 1863; June 8 and 15, 1864; *Mount Vernon Democratic Banner*, Dec. 5, 1863; June 18, 1864.

86. *Newark (OH) Advocate*, June 10, 1864, quoted in *Coshocton Democrat*, June 15, 1864.

87. *Mount Vernon Democratic Banner*, June 18, 1864.

Noah Swayne (Courtesy of the Library of Congress)



and Laurant Blanchat, went to trial on charges of conspiracy and assault before judges Swayne and Willson. The jury found Rinkenberger not guilty, but found Blanchat guilty on one of three counts. The court sentenced him to six months of solitary confinement and hard labor at the Ohio State Penitentiary in Columbus, and fined him \$500. In the following weeks and months, the federal prosecutor dropped the treason charges against Blanchat and the other Holmes County defendants; likewise, in 1865 and 1866 Paine dropped charges against the defendants in the Knox County uprising.<sup>88</sup> By then, the war had ended and citizens were eager to restore normalcy. As well, the Cleveland prosecutor may have encountered the same difficulties in proving cases of treason and conspiracy as the US attorney in Cincinnati had in prosecuting the Camp Chase conspirators, who aimed to release Confederate prisoners-of-war and lead them to freedom.<sup>89</sup>

Reference to census records and draft enrollment lists reveals that the scores of indicted and arrested Holmes and Knox County men came from a

88. Criminal Record Book, vol. 1, 1863–74, and Circuit Court Journal, no. 3, 1862–65, Record Group 21, Circuit Court of the Northern District of Ohio, NARA-C. Later in September 1864, President Lincoln pardoned Blanchat. See Drouhard, *It Don't Look Right for the Times*, 14, 38–40.

89. See Towne, *Surveillance and Spies in the Civil War*, 123–27, 249–50, 268; and Stephen E. Towne, “Exposing Confederate Conspiracies in Ohio: Camp Chase Plot,” *Timeline* 34, no. 2 (Apr.–June 2017): 14–27.

heterogeneous assortment of ethnic backgrounds. While the dozen or so men arrested and charged with the rescue of the four men who assaulted Robison were French-speaking Swiss and French immigrants, and several men with German names and backgrounds participated in the uprising, the large majority of the rest were native-born citizens of Anglo American background. Holmes County men with names like Ross, Still, and Jones rebelled. They were joined by Knox County men named Freeman, Hyde, Porterfield, Scott, and Bennington. The Coshocton County men went by Blackman, Buckalew, and Johnson, the Licking County man was named Taylor. This cosmopolitan ethnic mixture rose up in concert in Holmes and Knox counties.<sup>90</sup>

## V.

The glue that connected this multiethnic assortment was adherence to the Democratic Party. By the spring of 1863, party followers adamantly opposed war if it entailed freeing African American slaves in the South. Some Democrats believed that the Confederate states had the constitutional right to secede, and the federal government was wrong to try to coerce the Southern rebels back into the Union. They rejected innovations in government introduced by Lincoln's Republican government such as an income tax and a strong central bank issuing greenbacks. They feared the threat of military arrests and trials, and raged at military suppression of the Democratic press. Conscription was the last straw, as it meant persons who opposed the war might be forced to fight in it. Hence, men declared themselves "secessionists" against a regime they viewed as advancing unconstitutional measures. They took up arms to defend these views as much as to preserve their autonomy.<sup>91</sup>

While historians lack internal records of secret organizations active in

90. A local historian notes that the French-speaking rescuers were Catholic and mostly related to each other by marriage. See Drouhard, *It Don't Look Right for the Times*, 19–20.

91. Several otherwise useful studies of Democrats during the Civil War rely on Frank L. Klement's erroneous conclusions when addressing resistance to the war. See Joel H. Silbey, *A Respectable Minority: The Democratic Party in the Civil War Era, 1860–1868* (New York: Norton, 1977); Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1983); Thomas S. Mach, "Gentleman George" Hunt Pendleton: *Party Politics and Ideological Identity in Nineteenth-Century America* (Kent, OH: Kent State Univ. Press, 2007); William C. Harris, *Two Against Lincoln: Reverdy Johnson and Horatio Seymour, Champions of the Loyal Opposition* (Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 2017); David M. Gold, *The Jacksonian Conservatism of Rufus P. Ranney: The Politics and Jurisprudence of a Northern Democrat from the Age of Jackson to the Gilded Age* (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 2017); Mark E. Neely Jr., *Lincoln and the Democrats: The Politics of Opposition in the Civil War* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2017).

Ohio during the war, evidence suggests that men banded together in organized groups to fight against what they saw as tyranny. Information from spies employed to infiltrate armed groups that aided deserters and threatened draft resistance prompted military commanders to believe that such organizations existed throughout the region. A federal grand jury reported that secret societies were behind widespread enrollment violence in Ohio. In particular, the Holmes and Knox County uprisings show evidence of organized resistance. First, Drake, the district provost marshal, reported that an organization existed in Richland Township to block enrollment. The use of cannons as communication tools to gather armed persons or to warn of approaching troops showed coordination. The secret networks to smuggle arms into the region in defiance of military order indicated concerted effort, as well as willingness to use force. Moreover, members of the military expedition reported the statements of captured insurgents. As war correspondent Mack reported, "They freely confess that they are secessionists, that they belong to a secret oath bound association, and are pledged to carry out certain objects, prominent among them . . . is resistance to the Government, even to death."<sup>92</sup> Family members of prisoners noted the role of secret organizations in the community. As well, the insurgents took their oaths of loyalty to their secret group seriously: during the June 10 rescue, armed men failed to coerce Drake, a fellow Democrat, to "take the oath," presumably to the organization; they pummeled the wagon driver for violating his sworn pledge.

Finally, the fact that hundreds of armed men came from a wide radius to make a stand in a rugged corner of rural Ohio showed concerted effort. The Holmes County and Knox County uprisings occurred one day and about thirty-five miles apart, a significant distance to travel by foot, horse, or wagon over hilly, circuitous, rough roads. The sequence of events of the two episodes involved many of the same persons. Holmes County men rallied to oppose

92. Letter of Mack, *Columbus Daily Ohio State Journal*, June 22, 1863. The prominent part played by William Greiner, one of the four who assaulted Robison on June 5, merits note. First, he carried a revolver while working at Peter Stuber's house. The shot he fired chasing Robison away may have served as a signal for persons to rally to resist the enrollment. Later, on June 10, when he and the others were arrested and the posse threatened by armed men, Greiner went out to speak to some of the armed bands. Still later, on June 17, after the battle near Napoleon, he rode to Millersburg to gather reinforcements; when refused, he threatened to burn the town. These acts suggest he held local authority in some capacity. On June 26, Greiner testified to the grand jury. See RG 21, Circuit Court Journal no. 3, 117, NARA-C. According to one contemporary account, during the rescue Greiner admitted to membership in a secret society "sworn to protect each other from arrests." *Daily Cleveland Herald*, June 18, 1863. A local historian draws attention to Greiner's important role in events. See Garber, *The Holmes County Rebellion*, 6, 10.



the arrest of the original four enrollment obstructers and, at the sound of signal guns, rescued them from a federal posse. Encouraged by that success, armed men from surrounding counties congregated in Richland Township. Their numbers swelled to over one thousand armed men. While encamped for several days, they heard speeches and sermons from local political leaders urging resistance to laws. Men from neighboring communities departed to return to their farms, leaving local Holmes County men to take a stand. Coshocton and Knox County men left Holmes to rally at Bladensburg, Knox County, where nearly one thousand armed men again defied authorities. But news of the military victory near Napoleon broke up the Bladensburg assembly. Intimidated Democratic leaders in both counties changed their tune and urged followers to submit to federal law. By a show of overwhelming military force, the government succeeded in suppressing organized draft resistance.

This new understanding of perhaps the largest incident of draft enrollment resistance in the Old Northwest upends several assumptions historians have made. First, the Holmes County uprising was cosmopolitan in nature, involving more than just ethnic immigrants intent on protecting local autonomy. The resisters jettisoned localism to defend Democratic ideology against perceived government tyranny.<sup>93</sup> Participants exhibited coordination in their communication, assembly, supply, and efforts to arm themselves to defend themselves and their political views. Unlike urban draft riots, these rural movements were not spontaneous. Military and civil authorities detected armed organizations behind this episode and similar enrollment violence throughout Ohio and the Middle Border states. Republican officials did not fabricate their existence for political purposes. Indeed, this study of one well-known but previously misunderstood episode should encourage scholars to dive into underused archives to study numerous similar events in Indiana, Illinois, and elsewhere in which draft resisters showed coordinated movements and Democrats willingly embraced violence to oppose the Lincoln administration. By loosening the historiographical handcuffs of the erroneous Klement thesis, historians will be free to uncover and analyze a more complicated, contested, intriguing, and, indeed, revolutionary political landscape in the North during the Civil War.

93. For studies of the triumph of partisan ideology over local cultures in the Old Northwest during the war, see Susan Sessions Rugh, *Our Common Country: Family Farming, Culture, and Community in the Nineteenth-Century Midwest* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2001); Richard F. Nation, *At Home in the Hoosier Hills: Agriculture, Politics, and Religion in Southern Indiana, 1810–1870* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2005).